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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 STATE 129774

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: CASC PTER ASEC ML

SUBJECT: TRAVEL ALERT - MALI

¶1. This Travel Alert is being issued to warn U.S. citizens of security concerns in Mali. This replaces the Travel Alert for Mali issued on February 12, 2008, expires on March 31, 2009, updates information on security incidents and areas of concern, including Essakane, and strongly urges U.S. citizens against travel to northern Mali.

¶2. Due to recent armed conflicts, kidnappings, armed robberies, and the continued presence of Al-Qaeda in the Land of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), the Department of State recommends that U.S. citizens avoid all travel to northern Mali. AQIM has been designated as a terrorist organization by the United States. The presence of AQIM and Tuareg rebel groups in northern Mali presents serious potential dangers to travelers.

¶3. Areas of particular concern include the Mali-Niger and Mali-Algeria borders, the Kidal region, and areas north of Timbuktu. This includes Essakane, site of Timbuktu's Festival in the Desert scheduled for January 8-10, 2009. American citizens who must travel to any of these areas despite this Travel Alert should remain vigilant at all times, exercise extreme caution, and avoid large gatherings.

¶4. U.S. government employees, including those on temporary duty, must have special permission to travel to Timbuktu, Essakane, Menaka, and towns in the region of Kidal. Individuals traveling north of Timbuktu or to the region of Kidal often travel with Malian military escorts. However, an August 2007 attack by Tuareg rebels on a convoy escorted by Malian military personnel illustrates that this does not ensure safety.

¶5. While the government of Mali is working to strengthen security in northern Mali and to achieve a peaceful

settlement with Tuareg rebels, the area remains unstable. On October 31, 2008, in northern Mali, AQIM freed two Austrian tourists kidnapped in Tunisia eight months earlier. On October 16, 2008, bandits in the Kidal region of Mali carjacked two vehicles belonging to the International Committee for the Red Cross. Disparate Tuareg rebel groups attacked Malian military units in Tessalit in July 2008, in Abeibara in May 2008, and in Tinzawaten and Bourghessa in March 2008. On January 3, 2008, four Italians were robbed at gunpoint near Araouane, Mali, 150 miles north of Timbuktu by assailants whose affiliation remains unknown.

¶6. In September 2007, armed rebels attacked the Malian military garrison at Tinzawaten. On August 30, 2007, a truck transporting civilians from Algeria to Tinzawaten, Mali, hit a landmine, killing at least 14 people. On August 26-27, 2007, Tuareg dissidents attacked and kidnapped civilian and military convoys near the Mali-Niger border.

¶7. Americans planning travel to the northern regions of Mali despite this Travel Alert, including those planning to attend music festivals such as the Festival in the Desert in Essakane or the Sahara Nights Festival at Essouk, as well as Americans residing or traveling in Mali, are urged to register with the Department of State or the U.S. Embassy through the State Department's travel registration website, <https://travelregistration.state.gov>. By registering, American citizens make it easier for the Embassy to contact them in case of emergency. The U.S. Embassy is located at ACI 2000 at Rue 243, Porte 297. The Embassy's mailing address is B.P. 34, Bamako, Mali. The telephone

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number is (223) 2070-2300. The consular fax number is (223) 2070-2340. The Embassy webpage is <http://mali.usembassy.gov>.

¶8. Updated information on travel and security in Mali may be obtained from the Department of State by calling 1-888-407-4747 toll-free in the United States and Canada, or, for callers outside of the United States and Canada, on a regular toll line at 1-202-501-4444. For further information, please consult the Country Specific Information for Mali and the Worldwide Caution, which are available on the Bureau of Consular Affairs Internet website at <http://travel.state.gov>.

¶9. Minimize considered.

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